Simplified report on the investigation of the grounding of the pleasure vessel **ISAMAR**
Grand écuel d’Olmeto, Corsica
17 August 2013

Summary

On the afternoon of 17 August 2013 the 24m, 62gt, privately owned motor yacht *Isamar* struck the Grand écuel d’Olmeto shoal while on passage from Bonifacio, Corsica to Roccapina bay. The three crew were unable to halt the flooding, but were able to abandon the vessel with the eight passengers before *Isamar* foundered in 55m of water.

Narrative

*Isamar* left Bonifacio at about 1600 local time. The weather and sea conditions were ideal with calm seas and good visibility, and because of this the master decided not to switch on the radar. The master navigated by eye and monitored the vessel’s passage on an ECS1, which was set on a 6-mile scale. The vessel had no paper charts on board, and the master relied on the ECS to identify land masses and seabed topography. The ECS’s electronic charts had not been updated for nearly 10 years. Although the echo sounder was switched on, its shallow water alarm had not been set.

---

1. Electronic chart system (ECS), any type of electronic navigation system that does not comply with the International Maritime Organization’s requirements for classification as an Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS).
The master was on watch while the mate and stewardess attended to the passengers’ needs. After clearing Cap de Feno, he set a north-westerly course at 10.5 knots to pass through the 0.5 mile wide gap between the shoals Grand écueil d’Olmeto and Petit écueil d’Olmeto (Figure 2). No waypoints or course lines were set on the ECS.

At about 1730 Isamar lurched suddenly. This was followed by violent vibrations and the sounding of the high level bilge alarms for the engine room and lazarette\(^2\). The mate looked behind the vessel and saw an underwater reef through the clear sea.

The master immediately disengaged Isamar’s engines and rushed towards the engine room, which was entered through the lazarette. On descending into the lazarette he found himself thigh deep in water. He passed through the watertight bulkhead door into the engine room, where he found about 0.5m depth of water. He started two bilge pumps and, in an attempt to ensure their efficiency, led a flexible 75mm suction hose from the pump suction chest, directly into the lazarette through the open watertight door.

While the master was below decks, the mate mustered the passengers and instructed them to don their lifejackets. He then checked the vessel’s position on the ECS and noted that the display was on quite a large scale. By pushing the scale adjustment button four or five times, he reduced the scale to its minimum setting of 0.5 mile. At this scale, the ECS did show an area of shoal water not apparent on the larger scale. However, it did not display any depth soundings as shown on official hydrographic charts.

Upon his return to the bridge the master transmitted a “Pan Pan” urgency message by radio, which was heard by both the coastguard and vessels in the area.

Isamar settled by the stern and a nearby sailing yacht came close by to assist. As a precaution, the passengers and stewardess were transferred to the yacht by Isamar’s tender. The rescue yacht then took the survivors about 3 miles to their intended destination of Roccapina bay where they were transferred ashore. The master and mate remained by Isamar on the tender, but in constant communication with rescuers using portable VHF\(^3\) radios.

---

\(^2\) A vessel’s aft store.

\(^3\) Very High Frequency (VHF)
Around 1825 Propriano SNSM’s lifeboat arrived on scene to find *Isamar* settled by the stern and her forefoot almost 1m out of the water. It was apparent that *Isamar* was beyond saving and that any attempt to put men on board would be hazardous. *Isamar* finally sank in 55m of water about 3 hours later.

A subsequent dive inspection of the wreck showed that *Isamar*’s starboard propeller was intact (Figure 3) and that her port propeller and support bracket had been driven through the glass reinforced plastic hull (Figure 4) when the vessel struck the shallow reef.

**Personnel**

**Master:** The 60 year old master had spent most of his career on commercial yachts and had been master of *Isamar* for 6 years. He had previously held an STCW II/5 Certificate of Competency, issued under the International Maritime Organization’s International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, enabling him to act as master on yachts up to 500gt no further than 150 miles from a safe haven. He also held a Royal Yachting Association Yacht Master qualification.

**Mate:** The 35 year old mate had been involved with private and commercial yachts for 8 years. He held a Yachtmaster Ocean Certificate of Competency, issued by the UK Royal Yachting Association, which enabled him to act as master on yachts up to 200gt.

**Conclusions**

1. *Isamar*’s master relied on an ECS with electronic charts that were set to the wrong scale, unsuitable for the intended voyage and out of date as the primary means of navigation. The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency’s Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 379 (M+F) *Navigation: Use of Electronic Navigation Aids* advises: “If an ECS is carried on board, the continuous use of up-to-date paper charts remains essential for safe navigation.”

2. Had appropriate, updated charts been available on board, *Isamar*’s master could have prepared a passage plan which would have enabled him to ensure that the intended route was suitable for *Isamar*’s draught. MGN 489 (M) *Pleasure Vessels - UK Regulations* explains, inter alia, the requirements for passage planning.

3. The standard marine emergency procedure of isolating damaged areas by closing watertight doors, were not applied, allowing the vessel to flood and sink faster than would have been the case had the watertight openings been closed. Flooding was not contained by closing the watertight door between the lazarette and the engine room, and pumping capability was not used to best effect. Had the watertight door been closed and the pumps set to pump out the engine room, the vessel would have stayed afloat longer and might have been saved.

---

4 Société nationale de sauvetage en mer, France’s national society for sea rescue.
SHIP PARTICULARS

Vessel’s name  Isamar
Flag  United Kingdom
Classification society  Not applicable
IMO number/Fishing registration  Not applicable
Type  Private pleasure yacht
Registered owner  Stella Ducet Ltd
Manager(s)  Not applicable
Year of build  2003
Construction  GRP
Length overall  23.97m
Registered length  23.97m
Gross tonnage  61.50
Minimum safe manning  Not applicable
Authorised cargo  Not applicable

VOYAGE PARTICULARS

Port of departure  Bonifacio, Corsica
Intended port of arrival  Poltu Quatu, Sardinia
Type of voyage  Coastal
Manning  Three

MARINE CASUALTY INFORMATION

Date and time  17 August 2013; 1730 (local)
Type of marine casualty or incident  Very Serious Marine Casualty (UK)
Location of incident  Grand écueil d’Olmeto, Corsica
Place on board  Engine room and lazarette
Injuries/fatalities  None
Damage/environmental impact  Foundering with minor pollution
Ship operation  On passage
Voyage segment  Transit
External & internal environment  Wind west-south-westerly force 1
Daylight; visibility good
Persons on board  11